

Message Text

SECRET

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CG, BE, MASS
SUBJECT: LETTER FROM SECDEF TO MOD VANDEN BOEYNANTS

REF STATE 174273 (NOTAL)

1. FOREIGN MINISTRY'S DIRECTOR OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS (LEBRUN) HAS RAISED WITH US LETTER FROM SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RUMSFELD TO MINISTER OF DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYANTS RELAYING PRESIDENT MOBUTO'S REQUEST FOR BELGIAN ASSISTANCE FOR RENOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF ZAIRE AIRPORT FACILITIES (REFTEL). LEBRUN HAD COPY OF RUMSFELD LETTER AND SHOWED US COPY OF A DRAFT REPLY FROM VANDEN BOEYANTS. HE ADDED SOME FORTHRIGHT COMMENTS THEREON.

A. HE FOUND THE LETTER A "BIZARRE" MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT OF ZAIRE AND BELGIAN GOVERNMENT. WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RECENT BELGO-ZAIRIAN RAPPROCHEMENT, OF A JOINT COMMISSION MECHANISM FOR DISCUSSION AND RESOLUTION OF BILATERAL ISSUES, MOBUTO'S ACTION IN PASSING A MESSAGE TO BELGIANS THROUGH SECDEF IS HARD TO FATHOM.

B. LEBRUN SAID NO ONE IN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE HAS ANY RECOLLECTION OF THE 1971 PROJECT REFERRED TO
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IN FIRST PARAGRAPH OF THE SECDEF LETTER. LEBRUN

AND DIRECTOR GENERAL DAVIGNON HAVE BEEN WORKING ON ZAIRIAN AFFAIRS SINCE CONGO'S INDEPENDENCE. DIRECTOR GENERAL VANDEN BLOOCK WAS AMBASSADOR IN KINSHASA IN 1971. THE THREE MET THIS WEEK TO DISCUSS THE SECDEF LETTER, AND NONE COULD REMEMBER THE PROJECT IN QUESTION. LEBRUN NOTED THAT PRESIDENT MOBUTO'S MEMORY IS NOTORIOUSLY UNRELIABLE.

C. LEBRUN SAID THE BELGIAN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AS WELL AS KEY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT ARE UNWILLING TO INCREASE BELGIAN ASSISTANCE TO ZAIRE. THE AIR FORCE, IN WHOSE BAILIWICK AIRPORT IMPROVEMENT WOULD FALL, IS ESPECIALLY RELUCTANT TO INITIATE ANY NEW PROGRAMS WITH ZAIRE. THE AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP HAS NOT FORGOTTEN MOBUTU'S LAST PERIOD OF DISENCHANTMENT WITH BELGIUM IN THE EARLY 1970'S WHEN HE RAN BELGIAN AIR FORCE UNITS OUT OF THE COUNTRY ON SHORT NOTICE, FORCING THEM TO ABANDON FACILITIES AND AID PROGRAMS.

2. LEBRUN SAID GOVERNMENT WAS AWAITING COMMENTS FROM BELGIAN EMBASSY IN KINSHASA BEFORE SENDING VANDEN BOEYANTS' REPLY TO SECDEF. HE THOUGHT IT WOULD GO AS PRESENTLY DRAFTED. DRAFT THANKS SECDEF WARMLY FOR PASSING THE MOBUTU MESSAGE, STATES THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY CANNOT RECALL THE PROJECT IN QUESTION, AND SAYS THAT THE MATTER IS BEING REFERRED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR APPROPRIATE ACTION. IN SHORT, ACCORDING TO LEBRUN, WITH VANDEN BOEYANTS' BREAD-AND-BUTTER NOTE THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD CONSIDER THE MATTER CLOSED.

COMMENT: FROM THE MOMENT THE SECRETARY OF STATE RAISED THE MATTER WITH FOREIGN MINISTER VAN ELSLANDE AT THE OSLO NATO MINISTERIAL, BELGIAN DECISION-MAKERS HAVE BEEN ICE-COLD ON NEW ARMS AID TO ZAIRE. RIDING A WAVE OF RECONCILIATION WITH MOBUTU AND CONCERNED ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA OF A WEAK ZAIRE, SENIOR BELGIAN OFFICIALS ARE NEVERTHE- LESS CONVINCED BY HARD EXPERIENCE THAT ANY KIND OF MAP FOR ZAIRE IS AN UTTER LOSER DOING US AND

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ZAIRE MORE HARM THAN GOOD. SENIOR OFFICERS IN UNIFORMED SERVICES HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY EXPLICIT IN TELLING US THEY WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. RENNER

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